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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

DEPT FOR DRL/IL; LABOR FOR ILAB AND ODEP; FOR LABOR  
REPORTING OFFICERS AND LABOR ATTACHES

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SUBJECT: USEU LABOR/SOCIAL AFFAIRS HIGHLIGHTS  
NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2003

REF: BRUSSELS 5457 (NOTAL)

1. (U) This is first cable in new series designed to provide labor reporting officers and attaches with a review of recent key EU actions in the areas of labor affairs and social policy as well as a look-ahead of what to expect in coming months. This report will highlight areas of US/EU dialogue/cooperation on labor affairs as well as labor related issues that we currently are tracking. USEU will continue to provide a separate monthly report on EU unemployment statistics (reftel).

US/EU Seminar on Disabled in the Workplace  
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2. (U) US Department of Labor Assistant Secretary Dr. Roy Grizzard (Office of Disability Policy) headed an USG/private sector delegation here November 17-19 attending an US/EU Seminar on Access of People with Disabilities to Employment. Conference highlights included mutual recognition that both sides of the Atlantic face a very high unemployment rate - about 70% - among their disabled -- and that the EU has no equivalent of an Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). EU NGO participants were especially interested in developing ADA protections for EU workplaces. To our pleasant surprise, there were no expressions of an alleged European superiority over the US on the treatment of the handicapped; in fact, most Europeans agreed that there was much that Europe could learn from the US. Adding urgency to EU concern is the high rate of disabled workers (25 percent) among the forthcoming ten new EU members; among the current 15 members, 15 percent of their workforce is disabled.

EU Commissioner trip to the US: hits and misses  
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3. (SBU) EU Commissioner for Labor and Social Affairs Anna Diamantopoulou traveled to NY and Boston November 20-24. She stunned some of her staff when she decided to cancel the Washington leg of her trip allegedly because of difficulties in getting appointments on the Hill. According to one of her closest advisors, the highlight of her trip was meeting with UNSYG Kofi Annan where the central topic of their conversation was what the EU is doing in the area of Corporate Social Responsibility. In Boston, she argued at a Kennedy School speech that Europe can learn from the US and that the transatlantic relationship is too important to let it break up. Of particular note is that during most of her speech, she sounded more like the Commissioner for foreign relations than a Commissioner for Labor and Social Affairs - but it is open secret in Brussels that the Diamantopoulou is very interested in pursuing a political career back in Greece once her term on the Commission expires next October 31.

EU Commissioner to G-8 Labor Ministerial  
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4. (SBU) Secretary of Labor Chao has agreed to a request from Diamantopoulou for a bilateral meeting (December 15) at the G-8 labor ministerial in Stuttgart later this month. According to the Commissioner's deputy chief of staff, the Commissioner will be interested in talking about labor standards, corporate social responsibility, and the impact of enlargement on the EU work force.

Labor Experts Gloom on Meeting Lisbon Goals  
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5. (U) For the last half year, former Dutch PM Wim Kok has chaired a committee of labor market experts on how EU member states are meeting the three Lisbon employment goals of 70 percent labor force utilization; 60 percent utilization of female workers and 50 percent utilization of older workers (defined as 55-64). In their report released November 26, the experts note that the EU is meeting none of these goals - unlike the US. The reports cited inflexible labor market policies as a particular problem and argued that Europe should not respond just to the current slowdown, but also needs to more effectively address the structural challenge of globalization and the rapid aging of its population. USEU

Labor Counselor participated in a November 27 panel discussion on the report (sponsored by the European Voice) in Brussels called "2010: a Work Odyssey: Shaping the European Employment Market." The discussion was somewhat gloomy because of fear that with enlargement, the EU is more likely to go even further backwards in meeting their Lisbon employment goals.

#### US/EU Labor and Social Affairs Task Force

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16. (U) On November 18, USEU attended the first-ever DVC of the US/EU working group on employment and labor related issues (between USDOL and DG-Employment). Main purpose of the meeting was to lay out a joint work plan for 2005 and confirm 2004 work plan. Future projects include joint seminars on Information and Communication Technology outsourcing, immigration and labor market integration, and a possible joint conference/seminar on anti-discrimination in 2005. Also discussed were follow-up projects from the disability seminar (above) and an earlier joint US/EU occupational safety and health seminar in Greece.

#### US Department of Labor visitor

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17. (SBU) USDOL/ILAB European Area Advisor Bill Brumfield visited Brussels 11/20-21. We met with EC, Union of Industrial and Employers' Confederations of Europe (UNICE), European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) and International Confederation of Free Trade Union (ICFTU) officials. We had a key meeting with Tom Jenkins, the newly arrived international affairs advisor to ETUC secretary general John Monks. Under Monks, the ETUC is much more receptive to working with the ICFTU and us than the previous standoffish leadership. Our ICFTU interlocutor previewed ICFTU interest in hearing more about how the US will handle the labor aspects of its forthcoming G-8 presidency.

#### What we're tracking

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18. (SBU) ICFTU plans/projects for Iraq labor unions, EU assessment of its "2003: the European Year of People with Disabilities," Irish EU Presidency Plans for Labor and Social Issues; Commission concerns on the impact of the enlargement on the EU labor market; potential impact of EU Intergovernmental Convention (IGC)/Constitution process on labor and social issues.  
Foster